



Feeding Behavior and Nutritional Status of Toddlers in Rural Areas

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Abstract:

Nutritional status is a serious public health problem because it is associated with an increased risk of mortality and morbidity. This problem is caused by caregivers' feeding habits, which can affect the nutritional status of toddlers. The impacts that arise if not handled properly will pose a risk of stunted growth and development of toddlers. This research analyses the relationship between feeding behaviour and nutritional status in toddlers. The research design uses correlation analysis with a cross-sectional approach. The independent variable is feeding behaviour, and the dependent variable is the nutritional status of toddlers. This research was conducted in December 2024 in the Dawe Kudus Community Health Center Work Area. A total sample of 71 caregivers was selected using random sampling techniques. The research instruments used the Child Feeding Questionnaire, digital scales, and microtois. Data analysis used the Spearman Rank (ρ) test. The research results showed a statistically significant relationship between feeding behaviour and the nutritional status of toddlers, with a value of $p = 0.003$ ($p < 0.05$). This feeding behaviour contributes to improving the nutritional status of toddlers, so there is a need for further intervention to improve caregiver behaviour in feeding so that the nutritional status of toddlers is optimal.

Keywords: Feeding Behavior, Nutritional Status, Rural, Toddlers.

1. INTRODUCTION

Indonesia is currently facing double nutritional challenges, namely undernutrition and overnutrition. Malnutrition problems experienced include protein energy deficiency, stunting, underweight, and wasting. Malnutrition is a serious public health problem because it is associated with an increased risk of death and various diseases. Although malnutrition does not directly cause death, this condition in children is associated with high child mortality rates. Nutritional problems can affect various age groups, where nutritional disorders in one particular age group can impact nutritional status in the next stage of life and create cross-generational impacts. Malnutrition in toddlers can hurt physical growth, mental development and cognitive abilities, which

ultimately contributes to a decrease in work productivity. Toddlers who experience malnutrition have the potential to experience a decrease in intelligence levels of up to 10 per cent (Maflahah, 2019).

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), in 2022, around 148 million children under the age of 5 will experience stunting, 45 million children will experience wasting, and 37 million children will face malnutrition. Data from UNICEF, WHO, and the World Bank reveal that in the Southeast Asia region, around 27.4% of children under 5 years old experience stunting, 8.2% experience malnutrition, and 7.5% experience overweight. Based on the 2022 Indonesian Nutrition Status Study (SSGI) report, the prevalence of stunting in toddlers was 21.6%, while malnutrition in toddlers reached 7.7% (World Health Organization, 2024).

Based on Basic Health Research Data (2023), the prevalence of children under five in Indonesia with poor and malnutrition status reaches 16.0%. The National Medium Term Development Plan (RPJMN) 2020-2024 sets a target to reduce the prevalence of wasting to 7% by 2024. According to the results of the 2022 Indonesian Nutritional Status Study (SSGI), carried out by the Ministry of Health's Health Research and Development Agency (Balitbangkes) together with the Central Statistics Agency (BPS), the prevalence of

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underweight among toddlers in Central Java reached 17.6%. On the other hand, based on the Toddler Health Profile in Central Java, the prevalence of underweight toddlers was recorded at 10.56%.

Dawe Community Health Center is one of the community health centres in Kudus Regency, which has a relatively high incidence of malnutrition. Based on preliminary data in the Dawe Community Health Center working area in 2024, results from 9 posyandu reached 240 toddlers, with a total of 129 toddlers (3.7%) experiencing skin maybe. Based on a preliminary study at the Dawe Community Health Center, data was obtained that the Community Health Center had provided health education. Efforts to prevent stunting by holding posyandu for toddlers were carried out in the village by taking anthropometric measurements based on height indicators according to age.

The feeding habits of toddlers play an important role in influencing their nutritional status, which can be influenced by parents' lack of knowledge since infancy. Giving food too quickly can also cause digestive disorders such as diarrhoea, vomiting and constipation, which can impact the nutritional status of toddlers (Tho et al., 2024). Direct causal factors include infectious diseases and nutritional intake, while indirect factors include economic status, parenting patterns and maternal knowledge. Parenting patterns and maternal knowledge in caring for children are fundamental, especially in providing food appropriate to age and needs, implementing appropriate health practices, and providing attention and affection (Sir et al., 2021).

The various impacts of malnutrition on toddlers include increasing the risk of contracting infectious diseases, such as fever and colds, which can reduce children's appetite. A study by Azizah et al., (2022) revealed that frequent infections experienced by toddlers can reduce appetite, which ultimately contributes to weight loss. Nutritional problems are not only caused by a lack of food intake but also by the presence of disease. Toddlers who get enough food but often experience illness, such as diarrhoea or fever, are still at risk of experiencing malnutrition (Masri et al., 2021).

Research by (Ningsih et al., 2023) shows a strong relationship between maternal behaviour in providing food and the nutritional status of

toddlers. Similar findings were revealed by Sir et al., (2021), showing a significant relationship ($\alpha = 0.05$) between feeding behaviour and the nutritional status of toddlers. Apart from that, other research conducted by Novita Aryani and Henny Syapitri (2021) shows a relationship between feeding patterns and the nutritional status of toddlers. This research differs from previous research because it uses random sampling without specifying inclusion and exclusion criteria. This differs from previous research that used purposive sampling techniques and inclusion and exclusion criteria.

The findings of this research indicate that the method used successfully revealed relevant data and information per the research objectives. Research results also provide a deep understanding of the relationship or phenomenon being studied and support pre-existing theories. In addition, these results offer new insights that can be the basis for further research into the development and profession of nursing, which has focused on feeding behaviour. Besides, nurses are not only responsible for ensuring that they get adequate nutrition. Nurses, as educators, play an important role in educating mothers about the importance of balanced nutrition and proper feeding. Nurses increase maternal awareness of the long-term impacts of poor nutritional status and the importance of healthy eating habits.

The role of the nurse as a caregiver is to provide food to children under five, especially if there are indications of nutritional problems such as malnutrition; the nurse monitors the child's vital signs, weight, height and development and gives necessary intervention. Nurses work closely with medical teams, such as physicians, nutritionists, and social workers, to design and implement comprehensive care plans to improve nutritional conditions. Nurses also play their role as advocates, ensuring that nutrition needs are fulfilled. Advocating programs that support children also increase mothers' access to nutrition education. Nurses acting as researchers are involved in the research process by collecting data related to feeding behaviour and nutritional status of children under five, including carrying out anthropometry.

The aim is to analyze and understand the relationship between feeding behaviour and the nutritional status of toddlers in the Dawe Community Health Center working area, Kudus Regency.

2. MATERIAL AND METHOD

This research design uses correlation analysis with a cross-sectional approach. The independent variable is the temporary feeding behaviour variable. The dependent is the nutritional status of toddlers. This research was conducted in the Dawe Community Health Center working area in December 2024. The total sample of 71 caregivers of toddlers was selected using a simple random sampling technique. Researchers carry out simple sample randomization randomization by drawing many numbers or names of population members written on paper, then shuffling and selecting at random.

The instrument in this research is a questionnaire on the characteristics of maternal respondents, including age, income, education and occupation. The questionnaire questionnaire consists of 15 statements covering three aspects: type of food, amount of food, and feeding schedule. Questionnaire answer choices consist of very often (4), often (3), rarely (2), and never (1). Question items are divided into categories of type of food (questions 1, 2, 3, 4, 5), number of portions of food given (questions 6, 7, 8, 9, 10), and feeding schedule (questions 11, 12, 13, 14, 15). Interpretation The results consist of appropriate (55-100%) and inappropriate (< 55%) feeding behaviour.

Tools for measuring body weight (BB) and height (TB) to assess nutritional status use anthropometric tools, including the Baby Scale digital scale with the Omron HN-289 brand which has a measuring capacity of between 1 kg – 150 kg. This tool has a large LCD digital display for precise readings and can measure in kg, lb, or oz. Height measurement using stature digital baby meter brand GEA type SH-2A with units of measurement in cm or inch and a measurement range of 0-100 cm. This measurement's results are used to categorize nutritional status as good nutrition, over-nutrition, undernutrition, or poor nutrition. Observation sheets record the results of measurements of toddlers' weight and height. This research has been declared to have passed ethical review from the Health Research Ethics Commission of Universitas Muhammadiyah Kudus Number: 127/Z-7KEPK/UMKU/I/2025.

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Table 1. Mother's Characteristics Based On Age, Occupation, Education, and Income (N= 71)

	f	%
Age		
Early adulthood (20-39)	66	93
Middle adults (40-59)	9	7
Work		
Housewife	25	35,2
Self-employed	36	50,7
Teacher	3	4,2
Private officer	7	9,9
Education		
Elementary school/equivalent	8	11,3
Middle school/equivalent	27	38
High school/equivalent	24	33,8
College/equivalent	12	16,9
Income		
Have no income	25	35,2
< RMW (IDR 2,680,485)*	28	39,4
≥ RMW (IDR 2,680,485)*	16	25,4
Total	71	100

*) Kudus Regency Regional Minimum Wage 2025

Table 1 explains that for most mothers aged 20-39, 66 respondents (93%) work as entrepreneurs, and 36 (50.7%) have a junior high school education/equivalent. That is, as many as 27 respondents (38%) had income < Regional Minimum Wage Kudus Regency in 2025, namely 28 respondents (39.4%).

The research results show that the majority of caregivers are aged 20-39 years or belong to the early adulthood age group. This is in line with research (Gunawan et al., 2020) which states that mothers aged 30-35 years are in the early adulthood category at 78.4%. In reality, at that age, some mothers still do not understand and do not apply good care when caring for their children. Especially when choosing the right food for children. This research is also in line with (Sinaga et al., 2023) showing that the age of mothers of toddlers is mainly in the 21-35 year category, namely 39 people (66.1%). This is also in line with research Nurvitriana & Andarwulan, (2021) which shows that the majority of mothers are in early adulthood (26-35 years) as many as 45 (70.3%) respondents.

According to Knowles' theory, early adults are motivated to learn, want to gain knowledge and new roles, and are critical in receiving information. Apart from that, a person's age greatly influences their understanding and thinking patterns so that the knowledge they gain will be better. The more mature the age, the better the level of ability and

maturity in thinking and receiving information than those who are still young or immature. This age makes it easier for someone to receive better knowledge and knowledge (Nurvitriana & Andarwulan, 2021).

The research results explain that the majority of mothers work as entrepreneurs. This is in line with research Isnoviana et al., (2020), which states that the majority of mothers of toddlers whose jobs are self-employed are 6 (28.5%) of respondents. The results align with research Isnoviana & Yudit, (2020) which states that most mothers of toddlers whose jobs are self-employed are 28 (30.7%) respondents. They work to earn a living because they help their husbands, so mothers play a role in earning a living (Isnoviana & Yudit, 2020). This research is also in line with research Prasetyaningrum, Irmawati, & Supriyadi, (2024) which states that the majority of mothers of toddlers whose jobs are self-employed are 44 (53%) respondents. Work is something that humans need. These needs can vary, develop, and change and are often not even realized by the perpetrators. Someone works because they want to achieve something, and people hope that their work activities will bring them to a more satisfying situation than the previous one. The nutritional status of toddlers can be influenced by the condition of mothers who work as entrepreneurs. Mothers who run their businesses often face challenges managing time between work and caring for children, which can impact providing appropriate food and regular meal times for toddlers. However, there is also positive potential, such as being more independent in managing the family's diet if time and resource management are done well (Prasetyaningrum et al, 2024).

The research results show that the majority of mothers have an income of less than the Regional Minimum Wage of the Kudus Regency in 2024. This is in line with research Marshall et al., (2022) Income part The majority of mothers were below the Regional Minimum Wage; 59 of them had incomes below the minimum wage, and the majority of their children were very stunted 33 children. This research is also in line with (Aryani & Syapitri, 2021), which states that the majority of respondents have incomes below the minimum wage of 14 (56%) respondents. This shows that low income limits mothers' ability to buy highly nutritious foods like animal protein, fruit and vegetables. This can cause a lack of balanced nutritional intake for mothers and toddlers. This

research is also in line with (Brink et al., 2022), which states that the majority of mothers of toddlers have incomes below the minimum wage (< 2,500,000). As many as 34 (58.6%) people. This means that families with incomes below the minimum wage consume cheap foods high in carbohydrates but low in protein and micronutrients, such as rice with a simple side dish. This can cause nutritional imbalances that impact the growth of toddlers.

The research showed several mothers had junior high school/equivalent educational backgrounds. In line with research (Rusmil et al., 2019), which states that the majority of mothers of toddlers have a junior high school education, 76 (80.9%) of respondents. This means that mothers with a junior high school education generally have a more limited understanding of nutrition. This can influence parenting patterns and food choices for toddlers. This research also aligns with Azizah et al., (2022), who states that most mothers of toddlers have a junior high school education of 9 respondents (44%). This is a matter of concern about the mother's education level below high school because it is related to knowledge, attitudes and behaviour of the mother's parenting style towards her child in providing nutrition and nutritional deficiencies to her child, which can cause stunting and malnutrition.

Table 2. Feeding Behavior (N=71)

Feeding behavior	F	%
Appropriate	40	56,3
Not exactly	31	43,7
Total	71	100

Table 2 shows that most toddlers' feeding behaviour has appropriate feeding behaviour, namely 40 respondents or (56.3%). This study categorized feeding behaviour into two categories: appropriate and inappropriate. The research results obtained in the Dawe Community Health Center working area showed that most respondents had appropriate feeding behaviour, namely 40 respondents (56.3%). This shows that the majority of respondents have an appropriate level of feeding behaviour, which means they have a good understanding of the importance of maintaining the diet of toddlers. This study's results align with research Eka Masturina et al., (2023) showing that most toddlers have good eating patterns, 61%. This explains that food consumption or good feeding patterns influence toddlers' nutritional status (growth). This research is also in line with Kurniawan et al., (2021), showing that feeding

behaviour was found in 29 (61.7) respondents. Feeding behaviour is a pattern or form of parental care related to eating through interactions between parents/caregivers and children in the eating process. Various things need to be considered when giving food to children, namely choosing food ingredients by paying attention to their nutritional content, food texture appropriate to the child's age, time of giving food, and behaviour when giving food. The problem of feeding toddlers is related to the mother's behaviour, which can be seen in good habits and the lack of feeding toddlers. Apart from feeding food, scheduling the meal menu is also very important for children (Sir et al., 2021). Factors according to Sir et al., (2021), namely economic, socio-cultural, psychology, environment, and maternal age.

Table 3. Nutritional status in toddlers (n=71)

Nutritional status	f	%
Poor (< -3SD)	21	29,6
Less (<-3 SD-2 SD)	9	12,7
Good (-2SD -2SD)	40	56,3
More (>2SD)	1	1,4
Total	71	100

Table 3 states that half of the toddlers have good nutritional status, namely 40 (56.3%). In this study, nutritional status consisted of 4 categories: good, poor, bad, and more. The results of research in the Dawe Community Health Center work area show that the majority of respondents have good nutritional status, as many as 40 respondents (56.3%). This shows that most respondents have good nutritional status, which means that a person gets adequate and balanced nutritional intake

according to their body's needs so that it can support optimal growth, development and body function. This research is the same as research conducted (Andayani & Afnuhazi, 2022) showing that the majority of toddlers have good nutritional status, there are 55 respondents (59.1%). This means that this research shows that the nutritional status of toddlers is still lacking. This research is also in line with (Ningsih et al., 2023), showing that the majority have good nutritional status, 83 (79%). This is to maintain good nutritional status, a balanced nutritious diet, sufficient physical activity, healthy living habits, and regular growth and development monitoring, especially in children and toddlers (Ti Ripan, 2021). Nutritional status is a state of balance between the intake and needs of nutrients that the body needs for the growth and development process, especially for children under five, activities, health maintenance, healing for those who suffer from illness and other biological processes in the body (Dewi, 2022).

According to Kurniawan et al., (2021), The nutritional needs of toddlers are the amount and type of nutrients needed to support the physical and mental growth and development of children aged 1 to 5 years. These needs include carbohydrates, proteins, fats, vitamins, and minerals, all of which contribute to optimal health, a strong immune system, and cognitive development. 2 factors influence nutritional status, namely direct facts, including illness history in the last 1 month, birth history, breastfeeding history. Exclusive history of feeding behaviour, while indirect includes socio-economics, education, knowledge, income, parenting patterns, and environmental sanitation

Table 4. The relationship between feeding behaviour and nutritional status in toddlers

Feeding behavior	Nutritional status								Amount	r	p-value
	Not enough		Bad		Good		More				
	f	%	f	%	F	%	f	%			
Appropriate	0	0	0	0	40	56,3	0	0	40	0,342	0,003
Not exactly	9	12,7	21	29,5	0	0	1	1,4	31		
Total	9	12,7	21	29,5	40	56,3	1	1,4	71		

Based on the data in Table 4, this correlation test uses the Spearman rank test. It shows a statistically significant relationship between feeding behaviour and nutritional status in toddlers, with the strength of the relationship being weak ($r = 0.342$, $p = 0.003$). The study showed a relationship between feeding behaviour and nutritional status with a p-value of 0.003 ($p < 0.05$). This relationship is

statistically significant with sufficient relationship strength (correlation coefficient 0.342). This is in line with research (Ningsih et al., 2023); the results of the Spearman Rho statistical test obtained a correlation coefficient of 0.587, meaning that the level of strength of the relationship between maternal behaviour variables and the nutritional status of toddlers is 0.587 or strong. This means

there is a significant (meaningful) relationship between maternal feeding behaviour and toddlers' nutritional status.

Research results (Sir, et al., 2021) are available. There is a significant (meaningful) relationship between feeding behaviour and the nutritional status of toddlers. Meanwhile, the research results (Aryani & Syapitri, 2021) showed that $p = 0.037$. There is a relationship between feeding patterns and nutritional status in children under five. The mother's feeding behaviour is quite good if viewed from the type of food menu consumed by toddlers, the schedule and frequency of meals in toddlers, the way of processing, the way of presentation, and the way the mother feeds. In giving the given portion of food, a mother needs to be careful; if less will cause the child to be malnourished, too much is also unsuitable for toddlers.

In this research Ningsih et al., (2023), good feeding behaviour, such as providing nutritious, regular food, is very important to improve the nutritional status of toddlers. Proper and balanced nutrition supports physical growth, brain development and a strong immune system. At the same time, good hygiene helps prevent health problems hindering nutrient absorption. This study's results align with the research Eka Masturina et al., (2023). The bivariate analysis results show that feeding patterns influence the nutritional status of toddlers, with values explaining that food consumption or good feeding patterns influence the nutritional status (growth).

Good nutritional status is when the body receives good nutritional intake, thus allowing physical growth and general health to be in the best possible general condition. Good feeding behaviour plays an important role in improving the nutritional status of toddlers. Toddlers need a balanced nutritional intake from an early age to support their physical growth and brain development. Mothers aware of the importance of providing healthy food will ensure that their children get food rich in nutrients, such as vegetables, fruit, protein sources, and nutritious carbohydrates. Providing food regularly and at the right time also helps toddlers' bodies absorb nutrients optimally to avoid malnutrition and have enough energy for activities. In addition, healthy eating habits formed from an early age will shape good eating patterns in the future, support the body's immunity, and prevent various health problems. With good feeding behaviour, the nutritional status of toddlers can

improve significantly, making them healthier and ready to face the next stage of development. (Aryani & Syapitri, 2021).

In this study, nutritional status consisted of 4 categories: good, poor, bad, and more. The research results in the Dawe Community Health Center work area show that most respondents have good nutritional status. as many as 40 respondents (56.3%). This shows that most respondents have good nutritional status, which means that a person gets adequate and balanced nutritional intake according to their body's needs to support optimal growth, development and body function. The study showed a relationship between feeding behaviour and nutritional status with a p-value of 0.003 ($p < 0.05$). This relationship is statistically significant with sufficient relationship strength (correlation coefficient 0.342).

Thus, it can be concluded that there is a significant relationship between food modifications (Ningsih et al., 2023). The results of the Spearman Rho statistical test obtained a correlation coefficient of 0.587, meaning that the level of strength of the relationship between maternal behavioural variables and the nutritional status of toddlers is 0.587 or strong. So this means there is a significant (meaningful) relationship between maternal feeding behaviour and toddlers' nutritional status. The research results of (Sir et al., 2021) show a significant (meaningful) relationship between feeding behaviour and the nutritional status of toddlers. Meanwhile, the research results (Aryani & Syapitri, 2021) showed that $p = 0.037$. A relationship exists between feeding patterns and nutritional status in children under five. The mother's feeding behaviour is quite good if viewed from the type of food menu consumed by toddlers, the schedule and frequency of meals in toddlers, the way of processing, the way of presentation, and the way the mother feeds. In giving the given portion of food, a mother needs to be careful; if less will cause the child to be malnourished, too much is also unsuitable for toddlers.

The limitation of this research lies in the absence of parents during data collection, where the person who came was the toddler's grandmother. This happens because the parents are busy working, while the mother's condition does not allow her to be present. This situation can affect the accuracy of the data obtained, especially in feeding, because grandmothers may have different understandings or habits from parents in caring for and meeting the

nutritional needs of toddlers. Another limitation of this research is that the mother who filled out the questionnaire was in a hurry, so she lacked focus in reading and understanding each question. This can affect the answers' accuracy, which may not fully reflect actual conditions.

4. CONCLUSION

The research results show that there is a relationship between feeding behaviour and the nutritional status of toddlers. This shows that good feeding patterns, such as sufficient meal frequency, diverse types of food, and appropriate parenting patterns, contribute positively to the nutritional status of toddlers. Parents or caregivers with a good understanding of nutrition tend to provide food of appropriate quality and quantity to prevent nutritional problems such as malnutrition or obesity. On the other hand, inappropriate feeding behaviour, such as unbalanced feeding, lack of variety, or poor eating habits, can hurt the growth and development of toddlers. Therefore, education about healthy eating patterns is critical to improve the nutritional status of toddlers and prevent nutritional problems during their growth period.

Community health centres are expected to play an active role by educating parents about the importance of healthy eating patterns according to the child's age. Nutrition consultation services can also help families in preparing a balanced menu. In addition, monitoring children's growth regularly is very important to detect and prevent nutritional disorders early on. The researchers then developed research on toddlers who experienced less, good, worse, and more nutritional status so that the influencing factors could be minimized to reduce the incidence of under, over, and more nutrition.

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